

Public Testimony to the State Board of Education
January 21, 2009

My name is Sarah-Kate Maskin and I am a resident from Ridgewood in Bergen County. I have both a Bachelors Degree in Elementary Education and a Masters Degree in Special Education. I have been teaching for sixteen years and have witnessed firsthand the detrimental effects of our poorly written math standards. We are currently seeing the results of those poor standards in high remediation rates for students entering their post secondary education. Our benchmark should model the carefully planned, well executed current high math standards of Massachusetts and California. These have yielded a student population with some of the most prestigious international math rankings.

The state standards are the backbone to our children's education as they define the goals. Considering the current lackluster math standards here in New Jersey I am strongly urging you **to vote against the approval of the revisions until there are significant, meaningful changes instituted.** Currently those changes are not based upon the recommendations from expert mathematicians. Whatever changes have been made will do little to address previous and present concerns. Our current standards suffer a substantial lack of clarity and little rigor. They are content-poor, non-specific, vague and open to wide interpretation. In order for our children to be math literate they should include absolutely clear cut and concise goals.

It has been well documented that our current math standards are poorly written. On January 2, 2009, I received an email from Regina Botsford, my school district's assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction. According to information she received from Janet Caldwell, a member of the math standards committee, the changes in Grades 3 - 8 math will be "relatively minor." A simple side-by-side comparison of our current standards and the latest standards revisions draft validates Ms. Caldwell's statement. I think this is an egregious lack of oversight.

Grades 3-8 encompass six years of a public school education; almost half of a student's public school academic career. How can revisions be approved if roughly half of the grade levels continue with the current poor standards? It is therefore plain to see that a significant change is warranted akin to the aforementioned Massachusetts and California.

As a member of the New Jersey Coalition for World Class Math, **I am asking that our State Board of Education vote no on the math standards revision whenever they are submitted and redirect our Department of Education to revise our math standards to make them world class.** They should be on par or exceeding those of the traditional math powerhouses like Singapore, Japan and Hong Kong.

Our children deserve the best education to ensure the viability and future of the state of New Jersey and that of our great nation. You are privileged with the responsibility to oversee this awesome endeavor. The people are relying on you to act in the children's best interest. The National Math Panel and the states of Massachusetts and California have given us a blueprint to follow. We can do better. Voting no on the revised math standards is the first step towards preparing our children to be mathematically literate in school. Their futures depend on it in order to successfully compete in the global workforce. Thank you for your time and your consideration to this most serious issue.

From: Regina Botsford <rbotsford@ridgewood.k12.nj.us>

To: sktalks2u@aol.com

Cc: Daniel Fishbein <dfishbein@ridgewood.k12.nj.us>; Margaret Leininger
<mleininger@ridgewood.k12.nj.us>

Subject: RE: Learnia

Date: Fri, 2 Jan 2009 3:15 pm

Thank you, Mrs. Maskin. It's my understanding that Pearson has already been in touch with Tim Peters.

In the meantime, I have heard the general information that you relate in the second paragraph from Janet Caldwell, a member of the math standards committee. Based on what she has shared with me, it appears at this point that changes in Grades 3 - 8 math will be relatively minor.

Of course, things can change at the state level at any point. What is helpful, though, is using Learnia to get information about what students know and are able to do, so that instruction may more closely address students' needs.

Thanks for sharing your comments.

Regards,
Regina

The value of an education...is not the learning of many facts but the training of the mind to think something that cannot be learned from textbooks. ---
Albert Einstein

Regina Lemerich Botsford
Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment
Ridgewood Public Schools
49 Cottage Place
Ridgewood, New Jersey 07451
phone: 201-670-2727
fax: 201-670-2668